

# Washington State Progressive Caucus Questionnaire

**Explanatory Note:** Our endorsements (and sometimes donations) are generally made to people running for the state legislature, municipal and county offices, public utility commissioners, etc. If you are running for such an office, you may wonder why we are asking questions about state-wide or national issues. The reason is that local officeholders are tomorrow's senators, representatives and governors. Even if you have nothing of the sort in mind now, you may easily feel differently in a few years. We want to put people into the pipeline from, as Howard Dean once put it, "the Democratic wing of the party." We are old fashioned enough to think that the New Deal and the Great Society were good ideas and modern enough to be up to speed on all the latest organizing methods and apps. If you have reservations about answering any of these questions, please explain why.

**Candidate Name: John Paul Comerford**

**Position Sought: Washington State Treasurer**

**Campaign Manager: Sheila Preston Comerford**

**Consultant: Argo Strategies – Jason Bennett**

**Campaign Email: [jpc@jpclife.com](mailto:jpc@jpclife.com)**

**Campaign Phone: 206-625-3200**

**Website: [www.johnpaul2016.com](http://www.johnpaul2016.com)**

**Campaign Address: PO Box 9100, Seattle, WA 98109**

**Do you request the endorsement of the Progressive Caucus? Yes!!!**

## Labor

Do you support raising state and federal minimum wages? To what level?

- To \$15 an hour as soon as possible and then tied to increases in the cost of living.

What legislation would you support to make organizing unions easier?

- I have been a union member (AFSCME and SEIU) and strongly believe in the right to organize and would fight to defeat any effort to restrict the right to organize within State and Federal laws. My belief is that the labor-management relationship does not need to be adversarial and I have experience in dealing with the impact of a rising minimum wage and other increased employee benefits without litigation. Employers need to recognize organizing efforts and provide access to employees at all levels of the organization, including the initial worker orientation. If a majority of the employees seek representation and agree on a single union, then I would support that effort.

Also, I would strongly oppose any effort to make Washington a 'Right-to-Work' State. This has been my position for many years. I have been a long-term supporter of pro-labor legislation in Massachusetts, Florida and Washington

## Education

What is your opinion of high stakes testing? How would you change the way students and teachers are evaluated?

- Non-higher education is not within my area of expertise but I will be happy to share my thoughts on educational policy.

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- Each child learns differently. I have done a fair amount of work in behavioral finance and know that we all process information in different ways based on a multitude of factors. In many cases testing is an inefficient way to measure a child's learning. If I were given the responsibility to develop a metric to measure how successful a child has been in learning, I would relate the measurement to how well the child is able to adapt what has been learned to 'real world' situations. This measurement may be partially written, partially oral and partially observational.

Measuring teacher performance is a difficult task. No two classes of children are the same and standardized performance measurement is a very ineffective way to evaluate teachers. One of the areas that I have both studied and implemented in business is the 360 degree review process, where the employee (teacher) is rated by a group of superiors, peers, and subordinates (parents or older children) to get a more complete overview of the teacher and their perceived strengths and weaknesses.

What is your opinion of charter schools?

- I have always opposed charter schools. They take much needed funding away from the public school system.

## Environment

How would you promote development of alternative energy and prevent privatization of natural resources?

- One of the major functions of the State Treasurer is to sit on the State Investment Board. I have taken a strong position to eliminate holdings of fossil fuel and high carbon footprint investments and want to explore 'green' investment options within the alternative energy sector. I oppose the privatization of natural resources and would bring whatever power this Office has to lead the prevention of privatization efforts.

What are your plans for increasing investments in renewable forms of energy production? What types of renewable energy do you favor most?

- As mentioned above, I am open to exploring different options that can provide our investment funds with satisfactory returns to meet out fiduciary obligations to State workers and retirees. My personal preference in order of priority would be solar, geo-thermal and wind.

## Finance/Taxation

What would you do to facilitate implementation of public banking and monetary reform?

- I support the establishment of a Washington State Bank (Washington Investment Trust) and have earned the support and endorsement of Sen. Bob Hasegawa. President Carter appointed me to move the National Consumer Cooperative Bank through Congress, getting it authorized, included in the Budget and appropriated. This unique bank met a sector of the economy (consumer cooperatives) that was underserved by the banking system, much as are several sectors of our economy here in Washington State. I dealt with just about every argument against such a 'public bank' and secured both banking and editorial support for the Bank through a grass roots effort. I have a plan for increasing access to affordable housing, student loan and infrastructure funding with the State Bank.

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What solutions do you propose to fix WA State's highly regressive tax system?

- I am proposing a capital gains tax on gains over \$100,000, excluding gains within a qualified retirement plan or the sale of a primary residence. This would be a progressive tax as it would be indexed to the Federal capital gains tax rates, set as a percentage of the Federal rate. My initial projection indicates that a rate equal to 25% of the Federal rate would bring Washington about \$2.4 billion in annual revenue. While I would be supportive of a progressive income tax on incomes over \$100,000, I don't think that it would pass the Legislature, while this targeted capital gains tax might have some attraction to a broader coalition of groups.

## Health Care/Retirement

Explain your position (for or against) Medicare for All (aka single payer health care) in terms of the effect on local citizens, service providers, and government.

- I strongly support a single payer health care plan, but would like to see it combine the best of our current specialized provider system with the single payer function and single negotiator function for medications and medical devices. I have lived in the United Kingdom and have seen how well a National system works for primary care. It does not work so well in terms of specialized care and surgery. I support the expansion of local, neighborhood, health care centers and actually spent part of my early career in funding such centers in lower income parts of the City of Boston. I support the idea of hospital-based specialty and surgical functions. I'd like to see some competition within this area.

What policies do you oppose and what policies would you promote with respect to Social Security and Medicare?

1. Social Security is a basic right of American workers based on the contributory nature of the System. It is not welfare and is not an entitlement program. It should be actuarially sound and provide a minimum amount for lower income workers based on basic living needs.
2. Social Security should not have a cap on the tax on earnings, but should have a cap on benefits, similar to defined benefit pension plans.
3. Social Security should never be privatized.
4. Medicare should be expanded as a single payer national health care program for all Americans funded by a progressive payroll tax on all income earned.

## Security/Public Safety

How would you act to stop the militarization of local police forces and establish civilian oversight of law enforcement?

- I support the concept of civilian review panels and more subjective cultural training of our police forces. I support affirmative action to assure that the makeup of a local police force is similar to the population that it serves.

How would you preserve national security while protecting American's right to privacy?

- This is a very difficult question for a non-professional in this area to answer. As someone who has served in the military and provided civilian assistance to the military for pensions and employee benefits, I tend to find that there are quite a few dedicated and trustworthy individuals who are experts in the

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various forms of intelligence. I believe that our right to privacy is supreme, but so to is the duty of our Nation to protect us from harm, foreign or domestic. We need to find a balance that protects our privacy rights while allowing our Nation to protect our lives and the lives of our families. I wish that I had a more solid answer, but this is not my area of expertise at all.

## General

Do you consider yourself a Democrat? Do you consider yourself a progressive? Why?

- I am and always have been a Democrat. I registered on the day I turned 21 (I'm dating myself). I walked the streets of Boston for John Kennedy's Senate reelection campaign in 1958 and his Presidential campaign in 1960. I am currently a PCO in the 36th LD as well as serving on the 36th E-Board. I am also on the E-Board of the King County Democratic Central Committee and am an elected delegate to the 2016 Washington Democratic State Convention as I have been every year since 2000. I was a PCO in the 43rd LD before 2002 redistricting. I was active in the Bradley and then Gore Campaign (2000), the Clark and then Kerry Campaign (2004), the Obama Campaign (2008), serving on his National Retirement Security Committee. In 2012, I was on the Inslee finance committee, and played an active financial role in many State and local campaigns and have been a significant and constant financial contributor to the local Democratic Party and Democratic candidates for my entire professional career. Prior to moving to Washington in 1999, I was the Democratic nominee for the U.S. Congress from Florida's 16th Congressional District in 1992 and 1994, losing to Mark Foley in 1994. I also chaired the Northern Palm Beach County Democratic Committee.

I am a progressive because of the actions that I have taken when given the opportunity. I was one of the first, if not the first, banker to include sexual orientation as a forbidden practice in bank loan policy in 1979. As a CEO, I made sure that my senior management team reflected the workforce in gender and race. I helped lead the largest socially and environmentally responsible mutual fund family into the institutional pension marketplace and also provided minority managed fund options. As a young professional, I took an active leadership role in promoting the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

What parts, if any, of the [Washington State Democratic Party Platform](#) (← click link to view) do you disagree with? Why?

- The Platform is unavailable here or on the State Party website. Generally speaking, I am in agreement with all of the position of my Party. I have made this same statement to King County and several other counties and legislative district Democratic organizations

If this is not your first election, what other offices have you run for? If it is your first campaign, what other campaigns (candidate or issue) have you participated in? What did you learn from those campaigns?

- My first run for public office was in 1983 for the Boston School Committee, which had just converted from a 5 member citywide committee to a committee with 4 at-large members and 9 district members. I had full labor support in this non-partisan race and came in 6<sup>th</sup> place for an at-large seat. I ran for and

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won a seat on the South Palm Beach Town Council in 1989 and was the Democratic nominee against Republican incumbent Tom Lewis in Florida's 16<sup>th</sup> CD in 1992, losing with 38% of the vote. In 1994, I won the Democratic primary and runoff and lost to Republican Mark Foley. Since moving to Washington I have been involved in every Democratic Presidential and most State elections.

I have learned a lot from my previous races and, without disclosing my Campaign strategy, will make sure that I don't make the same mistakes that I made in 1992 and 1994. I fully trust my Campaign consultant Jason Bennett.

Have you ever been a precinct committee officer or held other Democratic organization offices?

- Yes, I am a PCO in the 36<sup>th</sup> LD and am on the E-Board, as well as being on the King County Democratic Central Committee E-Board. I chaired the Northern Palm Beach County Democratic Committee and have been an elected delegate to the 1976, 1980 and 1996 Democratic National Conventions and every Democratic State Convention in Washington since 2000.

What single issue is the most important motivator for your run for office? What proposals do you have for dealing with it?

- I view the Office of the State Treasurer as one of the most important positions in the State. It is an Office with a great opportunity for leadership and I don't believe that it has met its potential over the past 8 years. We need to fix our regressive tax system, get fossil fuels out of our investment portfolio, start a Sate Bank and provide world-class financial education to Washingtonians. I want to be an activist leader as State Treasurer.

Are there also important secondary issues? Describe your approach to implementing solutions?

I am a consensus builder who can work across Party lines as well as other divides. To me, open and honest communications and clear objectives are the way to achieve solutions to real problems. The issues that I have mentioned above are the issues that I care most about, but I want to make sure that we serve as the best fiduciaries possible for the workers and retirees whose pensions we manage. I want to make sure that we explore all options for improving our debt rating and lowering debt service costs and I want to run the State Treasurers Office in a way that will make all of our employees proud to serve the people of Washington.

If you are running in a heavily Republican area, do you have a reasonable chance at winning? If not, how do you plan to use your candidacy to build ongoing connections among local people who share progressive values?

I believe that I have an excellent chance of winning both the Primary and General elections and I will build a Statewide organization of progressives to support my victory.